

WE CLAIM:

1. A method for providing computer software help utility, comprising the steps of:

providing an edit control;

receiving a search string at the edit control;

searching a database for answers responsive to the search string;

displaying a list of potential answers responsive to the search string;

selecting, in response to a user input, one of the potential answers responsive to the search string; and

displaying a help text responsive to selecting one of the potential answers.

2. The method of Claim 1, wherein the step of providing an edit control, further includes, providing an edit control on the tool bar of a software application data entry and editing window.

3. The method of Claim 1, after the step of displaying a list of potential answers responsive to the search string, further including the steps of:

allowing the user to determine whether an acceptable answer is provided in the list of potential answers;

if an acceptable answer is not provided in the list of potential answers, allowing the user to refine the search string; and

searching the database for more answers responsive to the refined search string;

displaying a second list of potential answers responsive to the refined search string; and

wherein the step of selecting one of the potential answers responsive to the search string includes selecting one of the potential answers from the second list of potential answers.

4. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

storing the search string in a list of most recently used search strings;

retrieving the list of most recently used search strings;

displaying a list of most recently used search strings;

selecting, in response to user input, the search string from the list of most recently used search strings;

searching the database for answers responsive to the step of selecting the search string from the list of most recently used search strings;

displaying a third list of potential answers responsive to the step of searching the database for answers responsive to the step of selecting the search string from the list of most recently used search strings;

selecting, in response to user input, one of the potential answers responsive to the step of displaying a third list of potential answers; and

displaying a help text responsive to selecting one of the potential answers responsive to the step of displaying a third list of potential answers.

5. A method for providing computer software help utility, comprising the steps of:

providing an edit control on the tool bar of a software application data entry and editing window;

receiving a search string at the edit control;

searching a database for answers responsive to the search string;

displaying a list of potential answers responsive to the search string;

allowing a user to determine whether an acceptable answer is provided in the list of potential answers;

if an acceptable answer is not provided in the list of potential answers, receiving a refined search string at the edit control, and searching the database for more answers responsive to the refined search string;

displaying a second list of potential answers responsive to the refined search string;

selecting, in response to user input, one of the potential answers from the second list of potential answers; and

displaying a help text responsive to selecting one of the potential answers.

6. The method of Claim 5, further comprising the steps of:

storing the search string and the refined search string in a list of most recently used search strings;

retrieving the list of most recently used search strings;

displaying a list of most recently used search strings;

selecting, in response to user input, one of the search strings or the refined search strings from the list of most recently used search strings;

searching the database for answers responsive to the step of selecting one of the search string or the refined search string from the list of most recently used search strings;

displaying a third list of potential answers responsive to the step of searching the database for answers responsive to the step of selecting one of the search string or the refined search string from the list of most recently used search strings;

selecting, in response to user input, one of the potential answers responsive to the step of displaying a third list of potential answers; and

displaying a help text responsive to step of selecting one of the potential answers responsive to the step of displaying a third list of potential answers.

7. A computer readable medium having stored thereon computer-executable instructions which when executed by a computer, perform the steps of:

providing an edit control;

receiving a search string at the edit control;

searching a database for answers responsive to the search string;
displaying a list of potential answers responsive to the search string;
selecting, in response to user input, one of the potential answers responsive to the search string; and
displaying a help text responsive to selecting one of the potential answers.

8. The computer readable medium of Claim 7 having stored thereon computer-executable instructions which when executed by a computer, wherein the step of providing an edit control, further includes, providing an edit control on the tool bar of a software application data entry and editing window.

9. The computer readable medium of Claim 7 having stored thereon computer-executable instructions which when executed by a computer, after the step of displaying a list of potential answers responsive to the search string, further perform the steps of:

allowing the user to determine whether an acceptable answer is provided in the list of potential answers;

if an acceptable answer is not provided in the list of potential answers, refining in response to user input, the search string, and searching the database for more answers responsive to the refined search string;

displaying a second list of potential answers responsive to the refined search string; and

wherein the step of selecting one of the potential answers responsive to the search string includes selecting one of the potential answers from the second list of potential answers.

10. The computer readable medium of Claim 7 having stored thereon computer-executable instructions which when executed by a computer, further perform the steps of:

storing the search string in a list of most recently used search strings;

retrieving the list of most recently used search strings;

displaying a list of most recently used search strings;

selecting, in response to user input, the search string from the list of most recently used search strings;

searching the database for answers responsive to the step of selecting the search string from the list of most recently used search strings;

displaying a third list of potential answers responsive to the step of searching the database for answers responsive to the step of selecting the search string from the list of most recently used search strings;

selecting, in response to user input, one of the potential answers responsive to the step of displaying a third list of potential answers; and

displaying a help text responsive to step of selecting one of the potential answers responsive to the step of displaying a third list of potential answers.

11. A system for providing computer software help utility, comprising:

a software module operative

to provide an edit control on the tool bar of a software application data entry and editing window;

to receive a search string at the edit control;

to search a database for answers responsive to the search string;

to display a list of potential answers responsive to the search string;

to allow a user to determine whether an acceptable answer is provided in the list of potential answers;

if an acceptable answer is not provided in the list of potential answers, to receive a refined search string at the edit control, and to search the database for more answers responsive to the refined search string;

to display a second list of potential answers responsive to the refined search string;

to allow a user to select one of the potential answers from the second list of potential answers; and

to display a help text responsive to selecting one of the potential answers.

12. The system of Claim 11, the software module further operative:

to store the search string and the refined search string in a list of most recently used search strings;

to retrieve the list of most recently used search strings;

to display a list of most recently used search strings;

to allow the user to select one of the search string or the refined search string from the list of most recently used search strings;

to search the database for answers responsive to the step of selecting one of the search string or the refined search string from the list of most recently used search strings;

to display a third list of potential answers responsive to the step of searching the database for answers responsive to the step of selecting one of the search string or the refined search string from the list of most recently used search strings;

to allow the user to select one of the potential answers responsive to the step of displaying a third list of potential answers; and

to display a help text responsive to step of selecting one of the potential answers responsive to the step of displaying a third list of potential answers.